DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 473 745 FL 027 595

TITLE	Report from the Centre for Language and Communication Studies on the Ninth Year of Extracurricular Foreign Language Modules for Students of Other Disciplines and the Fifth Year of Foreign Language Modules in the B.A. (Mod.) in Information and Communications Technology, 1 October 2001-30 September 2002.
INSTITUTION	Trinity Coll., Dublin (Ireland). Centre for Language and Communication Studies.
SPONS AGENCY	European Social Fund, Dublin (Ireland).
PUB DATE	2002-09-00
NOTE	18p.; For the previous year's report, see ED 467 496.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - General (020) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Curriculum Development; *Evening Programs; Foreign Countries; French; German; Higher Education; Italian; *Learning Modules; Second Language Instruction; Second Language Learning; Spanish; Student Evaluation; Student Recruitment

ABSTRACT

This report focuses on the ninth year in which the Centre for Language and Communication Studies (CLCS) at the University of Dublin Trinity College offered foreign language modules to students who were not studying a foreign language as part of their degree program. The modules are designed to develop students' communication skills for purposes of study, travel, or work experience abroad during their undergraduate years and enhance their academic qualification, vocational prospects, and potential for future mobility. Modules in German, French, Italian, and Spanish are available. The language modules provide two models, one extracurricular and the other fully integrated. The extracurricular (evening) modules have been subject to high levels of dropout, while the fully integrated modules are intended to protect against student dropout. This report provides data on student recruitment and participation rates, module design, assessment, and future directions. It also presents information from external examiners' reports of the French and German modules. An appendix includes a summary of income and expenditure. (SM)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 473 745

University of Dublin - Trinity College

Report from the Centre for Language and Communication Studies on the ninth year of extracurricular foreign language modules for students of other disciplines and the fifth year of foreign language modules in the B.A. (Mod.) in Information and Communications Technology 1 October 2001–30 September 2002

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

D.J. Little

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

FL 027 595

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

University of Dublin - Trinity College

Report from the Centre for Language and Communication Studies on the ninth year of extracurricular foreign language modules for students of other disciplines and the fifth year of foreign language modules in the B.A. (Mod.) in Information and Communications Technology 1 October 2001–30 September 2002

Contents

1	Introduction David Little Director, CLCS	1.1 Objectives, organization and funding	2
		1.2 Staffing	2
		1.3 CLCS's commitment to a research-and-development ethos	3
		1.4 Future prospects	3
2	Language modules in 2001–02 Klaus Schwienhorst Modules co-ordinator	2.1 Extracurricular modules	4
		2.2 Fully integrated modules (B.A. Mod. in Information and Communications Technology)	9
		2.3 Future directions	11
3	External examiners' reports	3.1 French (Dr Casimir d'Angelo)	12
		3.2 German (Prof. Dr. Bernd Voss)	14
	Appendix	Summary of income and expenditure	16

The foreign language modules that are the focus of this report were first established with financial assistance from the European Social Fund

1 Introduction

David Little

1.1 Objectives, organization and funding

1.1.1 Extracurricular modules

2001–02 was the ninth year in which the Centre for Language and Communication Studies (CLCS) offered foreign language modules to students who were not studying a foreign language as part of their degree course. Modules in French and German have been offered since the inception of the scheme, Italian was introduced in 1995–6, and Spanish in 1997–8. A full account of rates of enrolment, participation and completion is provided in section 2 of this report.

The objectives of the modules are (i) to develop students' communication skills for purposes of study, travel or work experience abroad during their undergraduate years, and (ii) to enhance their academic qualifications, vocational prospects, and potential for future mobility.

Students can take language modules for one or two years; each year of study is complete in itself. Although students in Science and Arts (Letters) who successfully complete their language module have bonus marks added to their annual examination result, the modules are offered to students on a strictly extracurricular basis.

The modules were introduced in 1993–4 thanks to a special grant of £100,000 that the Higher Education Authority made from its European Social Fund allocation: the HEA wished to give the learning of foreign languages a more central role in the undergraduate curriculum. The HEA again made special grants available to fund the modules in 1994–5 (£58,000), 1995–6 (£52,000), 1996–7 (£56,000), and 1997–8 (£56,000). Early in 1999 the HEA indicated that what had previously been an annual ESF allocation would be part of the College's recurrent grant until further notice. In other words, the long-term future of the extracurricular language modules scheme was assured, at least at its present level of activity.

1.1.2 French and German modules within the B.A. (Mod.) course in Information and Communications Technology

2001–02 was the fifth year in which CLCS provided fully integrated modules in French and German for all junior and senior freshmen taking the degree course in Information and Communications Technology. These modules are shaped by the same general aims as the extracurricular modules, summarized above, and they are taught according to the same pedagogical principles; but they differ in two important respects. First, because they are a compulsory component of students' main course of study, they impose a variety of additional organizational and administrative demands; and second, in theme and linguistic content they focus on the world of information technology.

The ICT modules are funded from the provision made for this degree programme, so that they enjoy the same long-term security as the degree course itself.

1.2 Staffing

In 2001–02 the modules were co-ordinated by Klaus Schwienhorst and taught by Sara Fernández Calvo, Yann-Drique Dehiere, Jean-Martin Deniau, Anette Dressel, Susana Olmos,

Breffni O'Rourke, Klaus Schwienhorst, Florence Signorini, and Helmut Sundermann. The success of the modules and the plaudits that they have again earned from the external examiners (see section 3 of this report) are due to the commitment and skill of this team of full-time and part-time teachers and the support they draw from CLCS's research-and-development activities.

1.3 CLCS's commitment to a research-and-development ethos

CLCS has always delivered its language modules within a research-and-development loop. Currently our principal focuses for research and development are (i) the use of the Council of Europe's European Language Portfolio (ELP) as a tool for the organization of learning and learner self-assessment, and (ii) the further development of tandem language learning in partnership with institutions in Germany, Belgium and France, using CLCS's MOO (text-based virtual reality). These two activities are described in greater detail in section 2 of this report. Here it is worth noting (i) that CLCS has played a major role in the Council of Europe's piloting procedures, which were a prelude to the introduction of the ELP on a large scale throughout Europe in 2001 (the European Year of Languages); (ii) that the version of the ELP now available to university language centres throughout Europe was developed in CLCS; and (iii) that the further development of our MOO has been supported by a grant from the Centre for Learning Technology.

1.4 Future prospects

The language modules that are the focus of this report provide two models, one extracurricular and the other fully integrated, for the realization of the second/foreign language dimension of College's Broad Curriculum policy.

Since their introduction the extracurricular modules have been subject to a high level of drop-out in Michaelmas term. On the whole, those students who complete extracurricular modules have a higher level of proficiency in their chosen language when they enrol for their module than those who drop out. This surely runs counter to the intention underlying the Broad Curriculum initiative. At the same time, the students who complete extracurricular modules achieve a commendably high level of proficiency in their target language, which represents significant added value.

Rates of participation in the extracurricular modules in 2001–02 were higher than in 2000–01. In Michaelmas term 2002 CLCS took several measures designed to improve matters further. First indications are that these measures will prove successful.

The fully integrated modules are by definition proof against student drop-out. That they too deliver a high level of learner satisfaction is confirmed by the fact that we now provide extracurricular modules for junior sophisters taking the B.A. (Mod.) in Information and Communications Technology (see 2.3.3 below). However, the decline in the number of junior and senior freshmen taking this course raises serious concerns about its long-term sustainability: 202 in 1999–2000, 169 in 2000–01, 108 in 2001–02, 55 in 2002–03 .

2 Language modules in 2001–02

Klaus Schwienhorst

2.1 Extracurricular modules

2.1.1 Modules offered

The modules offered in 2001-02 were as follows:

Monday evening

- German for beginners in Arts, Science, and Engineering, Year 1
- German for beginners in Arts, Science and Engineering, Year 2
- Italian for beginners in Arts and Science, Year 1
- Italian for beginners in Arts and Science, Year 2
- Spanish for non-beginners in Arts and Science, year 1
- Spanish for non-beginners in Arts and Science, year 2

Tuesday evening

- French for non-beginners in Health Sciences, Year 1
- French for non-beginners in Arts, Science and Health Sciences, Year 2
- German for non-beginners in Engineering, Year 1
- German for non-beginners in Arts, Science and Engineering, Year 2

Wednesday evening

- French for non-beginners in Arts, Year 1
- French for non-beginners in Science, Year 1
- French for junior sophisters in ICT
- German for junior sophisters in ICT
- German for non-beginners in Arts, Year 1
- German for non-beginners in Science, Year 1

2.1.2 Recruitment and rates of participation

The recruitment of students followed the same procedure as in previous years. Publicity and application forms were included in the mailing sent to incoming junior freshmen by the Admissions Office; separate mailings were made to rising senior freshmen in Engineering (including MSISS) and Computer Science and to students who had completed Year 1 modules in 2000–01.

Table 2.1 and Figure 2.1 summarize the rates of participation during the 23 weeks of the modules (expressed as a percentage of the total number of students enrolled for each module).

In Table 2.1, initial confirmed enrolment refers to the number of registered students on the first attendance sheet in week 2 of Michaelmas term. The final total recruitment adds to that number those students on waiting lists who were offered a place later in Michaelmas term. The percentage of students completing the modules has been calculated in relation to the initial confirmed enrolment.

As previous reports have noted, a rapid decline in junior freshman attendance is inevitable through Michaelmas term as students become fully aware of their study commitments and the social opportunities available in College; this is clearly visible in Figure 2.1. Nevertheless rates of completion for Year 1 modules were higher in 2001–02 than in 2000–01: 24% (71) compared with 19% (54). In the case of Year 2 modules, overall rates of completion were significantly higher than in 2000–01: 75% (47) compared with 48% (31). Overall 118 students completed the modules in 2001–02 (33% of the initial confirmed enrolment), compared with 84 (24%) in 2000–01. This represents a significant student commitment to what is, after all, an extracurricular programme.

Module	Initial confirmed enrolment	Number attending first session	Final total recruitment	Number completing module
Year 1 modules				
German beginners in Arts, Science, & Engineering (Monday)	9 Arts 5 Science 19 Eng. 1 Health Sc.	23 (68%)	50	8 (24%)
Spanish nonbeginners in Arts & Science (Monday)	21 Arts 10 Science 1 Health Sc.	21 (86%)	26	8 (25%)
Italian beginners in Arts & Science (Monday)	23 Arts 8 Science 2 Health Sc.	26 (79%)	47	12 (36%)
French non-beginners in Health Sciences (Tuesday)	1 Arts 1 Science 32 Health Sc.	26 (76%)	31	1 (3%)
German non-beginners in Engineering (Tuesday)	33 Eng.	26 (79%)	36	6 (18%)
French non-beginners in Science (Wednesday)	33 Science 7 Eng.	30 (75%)	53	16 (40%)
French non-beginners in Arts (Wednesday)	34 Arts 2 Science	27 (75%)	45	9 (25%)
German non-beginners in Arts (Wednesday)	22 Arts	13 (59%)	21	1 (5%)
German non-beginners in Science (Wednesday)	1 Arts 29 Science 4 Health Sc.	25 (74%)	42	10 (29%)
Year 1 total	**298 students**	**217 (73%)**	**351**	**71 (24%)**
Year 2 modules				
German beginners in Arts, Science & Engineering (Monday)	2 Science 1 Eng.	3 (100%)	3	2 (67%)
Italian beginners in Arts & Science (Monday)	8 Arts 3 Science	8 (73%)	11	6 (55%)
French non-beginners in Arts, Science & Health Sc. (Tuesday)	7 Arts 15 Science 4 Health Sc.	18 (69%)	28	18 (69%)
German non-beginners in Arts, Science & Engineering (Tuesday)	2 Eng.	2 (100%)	3	3 (150%)
Spanish nonbeginners in Arts & Science (Monday)	5 Arts 1 Science 1 Eng.	6 (86%)	8	6 (86%)
French for ICT	7 Eng.	7 (100%)	7	7 (100%)
German for ICT	7 Eng.	7 (100%)	7	5 (71%)
Year 2 total	**63 students**	**51 (81%)**	**67**	**47 (75%)**
Total	**361 students**	**268 (74%)**	**418**	**118 (33%)**

Table 2.1
Rates of participation

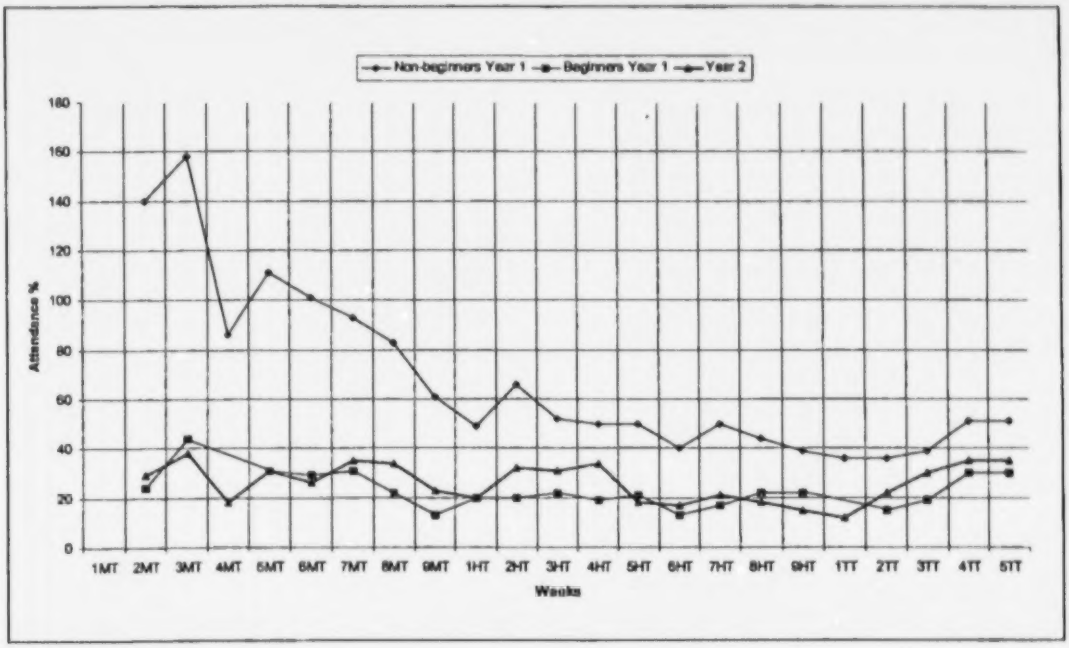

Figure 2.1
Rates of participation

2.1.3 Design of the modules

The project cycle structure first introduced in 1997–8 was used again in all the modules. Following a period of induction in the first weeks of Michaelmas term, each module comprised a series of four-week project cycles, each of which culminated in an oral presentation with associated written requirements. Projects are undertaken collaboratively by groups of four or five students. The rationale for such an approach is threefold. First, it facilitates use of the target language, which is a prerequisite for successful learning. Native speaker student assistants are employed to work with each group, and in this way the target language quickly becomes the dominant medium of communication. Secondly, project work allows students to focus on topics that they find interesting and relevant: the task descriptions that are distributed at the beginning of each project cycle are broad enough to encompass a wide range of topics as well as proficiency levels. Students are explicitly encouraged to draw on their major areas of study in preparing their projects. Thirdly, the skills inherent in the preparation and presentation of projects are not only typical of good learning practice but are also transferable to other domains, including the world of work. Among the skills that students must reflect on and develop are:

- the ability to work effectively as part of a small team, as well as on an individual basis;
- the use of digital resources during the research phase of a project;
- the effective presentation of information, using a variety of visual aids.

The commitment that most students showed to their projects and presentations confirms the appropriateness of this course design.

In addition, both junior and senior freshmen worked on a project entitled "Focus on language". This project is designed to engage learners in analysis of the target language as they prepare and modify their own language-learning activities. Students have to choose an authentic French/German text, and design a set of three interrelated exercises, together with solutions/answers, around it. The project is supported by group tasks in which students evaluate one another's exercises. However, the assessment for this project is individual, thus affording students the opportunity to demonstrate their individual capabilities.

CLCS has continued to pilot the Council of Europe's European Language Portfolio (ELP) with students taking the language modules. A revised version of the ELP was used extensively in beginners' classes, and a new version for non-beginners will be used in all modules in the academic year 2002–03. The ELP has three components: a *language passport*, which summarizes the owner's linguistic identity; a *language biography*, which provides a focus for planning, monitoring and evaluating the learning process; and a *dossier*, in which the owner keeps work done in the course of the year, personal glossaries, and source material used to support projects.

In the 2001–02 modules the use of the dossier was further developed. All workplans, e-mail exchanges or printouts which contributed to the development of projects were collected in the dossier. As in 2000–01, dossier requirements were formalized and students were expected to produce a personal vocabulary list, a full bibliography, written text, and source documents on the day they gave each oral presentation. This requirement was met with differing degrees of commitment; while some students demonstrated considerable capacity to organize their work, others tended to submit their work late and incomplete.

2.1.4 Design of assessment procedures

The practice of continuous assessment, first introduced in 1998–9, was maintained: students were given marks by their teachers for each of the three project presentations in Michaelmas and Hilary terms. The same rating grids were used as in the end-of-year examinations.

The end-of-year assessments were held over two weeks towards the end of Trinity term. As in previous years, they comprised (i) a pencil-and-paper test consisting of a 100-word dictation and a battery of 4 C-tests, designed to measure students' general underlying control of the target language system, and (ii) the presentation of the final project. New pencil-and-paper tests were designed and piloted with native speakers in the course of the year. Project presentations were marked by two examiners working independently of each other.

2.1.5 Assessment results

71 students took the end-of-year assessments for Year 1 modules and 47 students took the end-of-year assessments for Year 2 modules (including optional French and German modules for junior sophisters in ICT; see 2.3.3 below). The results are summarised in Table

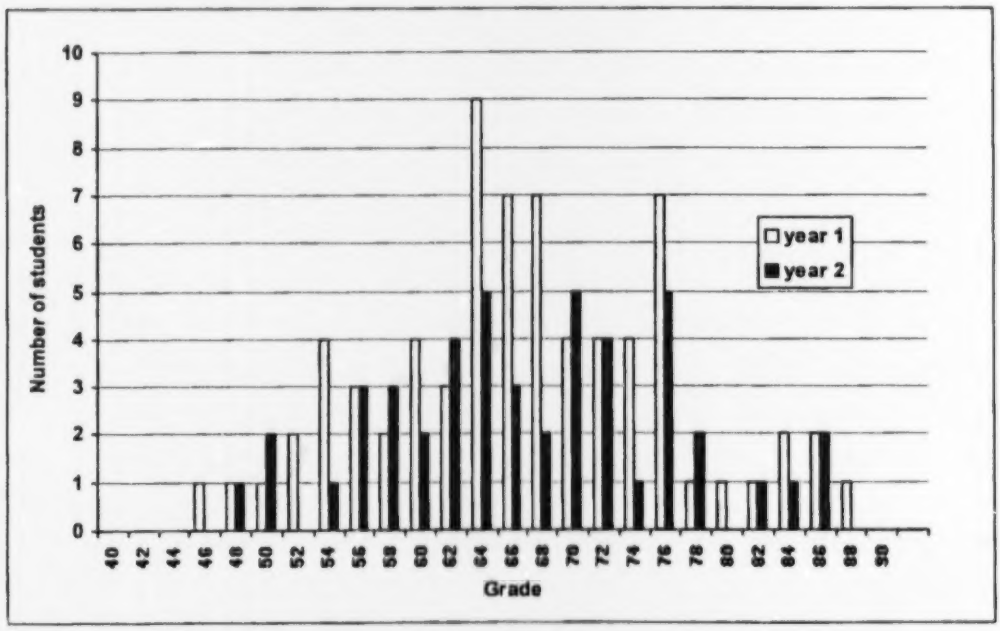

Figure 2.2
Extracurricular modules – assessment results (in detail)

Module	Student nos.	Average mark	Highest mark	Lowest mark
Year 1 modules				
French for non-beginners in Arts	9	68%	86%	59%
French for non-beginners in Engineering	2	75%	75%	74%
French for non-beginners in Science	14	67%	81%	54%
French for non-beginners in Health Sc.	1	-	72%	-
German for non-beginners in Arts	1	-	76%	-
German for non-beginners in Science	8	65%	71	52
German for non-beginners in Engineering	6	67%	76%	55%
German for non-beginners in Health Sc.	2	73%	75%	70%
Spanish for non-beginners in Arts	7	79%	87%	56%
Spanish for non-beginners in Science	1	-	68%	-
German for beginners in Arts	3	68%	75%	64%
German for beginners in Health Sciences	1	-	47%	-
German for beginners in Engineering	4	61%	64%	54%
Italian for beginners in Arts	7	58%	68%	49%
Italian for beginners in Science	2	49%	53%	45%
Italian for beginners in Health Sciences	3	60%	65%	52%
Year 2 modules				
French for non-beginners in Arts	4	70%	81%	58%
French for non-beginners in Science	13	66%	75%	53%
French for non-beginners in Health Sc.	1	-	69%	-
French for ICT	7	69%	76%	62%
German for non-beginners in Arts	1	-	86%	-
German for non-beginners in Engineering	2	73%	86%	60%
German for beginners in Science	1	-	62%	-
German for beginners in Engineering	1	-	61%	-
German for ICT	5	69%	76%	56%
Spanish for non-beginners in Arts	3	75%	83%	64%
Spanish for non-beginners in Engineering	1	-	58%	-
Spanish for non-beginners in Science	2	70%	77%	62%
Italian for beginners in Science	6	54%	64%	47%

Table 2.2
Assessment results

2.2, which shows the range of student performance classified by module and faculty. Figure 2.2 shows the assessment results in detail, while Figure 2.3 shows them according to class.

Of the students taking Year 1 modules, 38% were placed in the first class, 41% achieved a II.1, and 18% achieved a II.2. Of the students taking Year 2 modules, 45% were placed in the first class, 34% achieved a II.1, and 19% achieved a II.2. These results are similar to the results in 2000–01, although a higher percentage of students achieved a first-class mark in 2000–01.

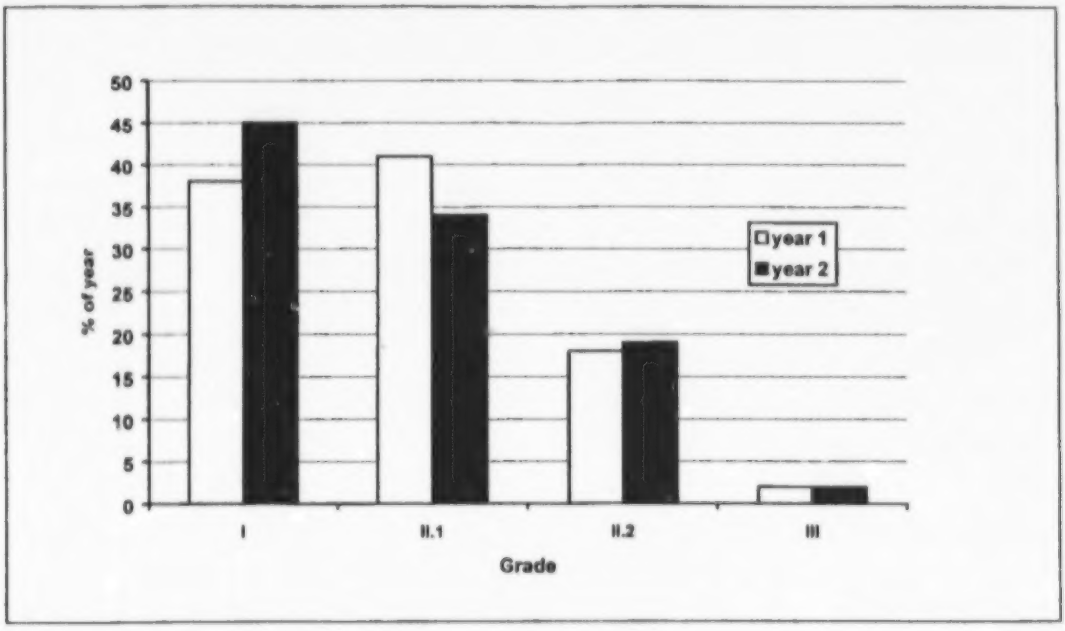

Figure 2.3
Extracurricular modules – assessment results (grades and percentage of year)

Each year a high proportion of students taking the extracurricular modules achieve I and II.1 results. In 2001–02, the proportion was slightly higher than in 2000–01: 79% of Year 1 students (76% in 2000–01:) and 79% of Year 2 students and junior sophisters in ICT (77% in 2000-01). This seems to confirm that the modules are completed by students who are more than averagely skilled at managing their time and study commitments and are strongly motivated to gain the best possible advantage from their undergraduate years in university. Teachers frequently commented on the excellent quality of students taking the Year 2 modules and the French and German modules for junior sophisters in ICT.

2.2 Fully integrated modules

2.2.1 Rates of participation

Students taking the B.A. (Mod.) in Information and Communications Technology are obliged to take a non-beginner module in either French or German in their junior and senior freshman years. They decide which language they will study on the basis of their Leaving Certificate results. In 2001–02, 108 students took these modules, as follows:

	Total	French	German
JF	46	33	13
SF	62	50	12

The ICT modules comprise one two-hour contact session per week and at least one tutorial meeting with each student per term. Attendance at all sessions is compulsory. During tutorials, learning difficulties are discussed and work is assigned which addresses individual weaknesses. The basis of tutorial sessions in 2001–02 was a written task assigned to each student at the beginning of the academic year. The texts students submitted were analysed by tutors and used as a focus for tutorial discussion. Students were then assigned a larger task (approximately six hours' work) to be completed in advance of the next tutorial session.

2.2.2 Course design

The ICT modules are broadly similar in structure to the extracurricular modules: a period of induction followed by four project cycles. In the junior freshman year the topics

for project presentations include: a public hearing/debate on a particular social or environmental issue; the creation of a web site; and an information booklet containing general or specific information of interest to visitors to France or Germany. The emphasis is on raising levels of general language proficiency and developing the skills necessary for the collaborative preparation of projects.

In the senior freshman year the modules are designed with students' principal areas of study in mind. Thus the project topics include: a report on a particular area of computer technology; a review of a French/German web site; and a discussion of the role of computers in society.

In addition, both junior and senior freshmen completed a "Focus on language" project (cf. 2.1.3 above) for which they were encouraged to use computer-related texts.

ICT students used the ELP in the same way as students taking the extracurricular modules (see 2.1.3 above). In addition, the self-assessment that is central to the ELP process counted for 10% of students' final mark .

We noted in the report for 2000–01 that the dossier component of the ELP had given rise to two problems. First, some students ignored (or perhaps were unaware of) the usual conventions of citation and attribution; second, some students made uncritical use of machine translation tools. While the first problem persists, the number of students who have used machine translation has decreased, probably due to two factors: (i) guidelines on plagiarism were included in the course handbook; and (ii) we encouraged students to use machine translation (from the target language into English) as an aid to reading comprehension, which may have promoted a more critical view of what machine translation can achieve.

2.2.3 Assessment results

Students taking the B.A. (Mod.) ICT modules were assessed in the same way as those taking evening language modules: continuous assessment in Michaelmas and Hilary terms and formal end-of-year assessment (but including teacher-monitored self-assessment) in Trinity term. Figures 2.4 and 2.5 provide a graphic overview of the assessment results. Of the 46 junior freshmen, 7% achieved a first-class mark, 26% achieved II.1, 24% achieved II.2, 22% achieved III, and 21% failed. Of the 62 senior freshmen, 8% achieved a first-class

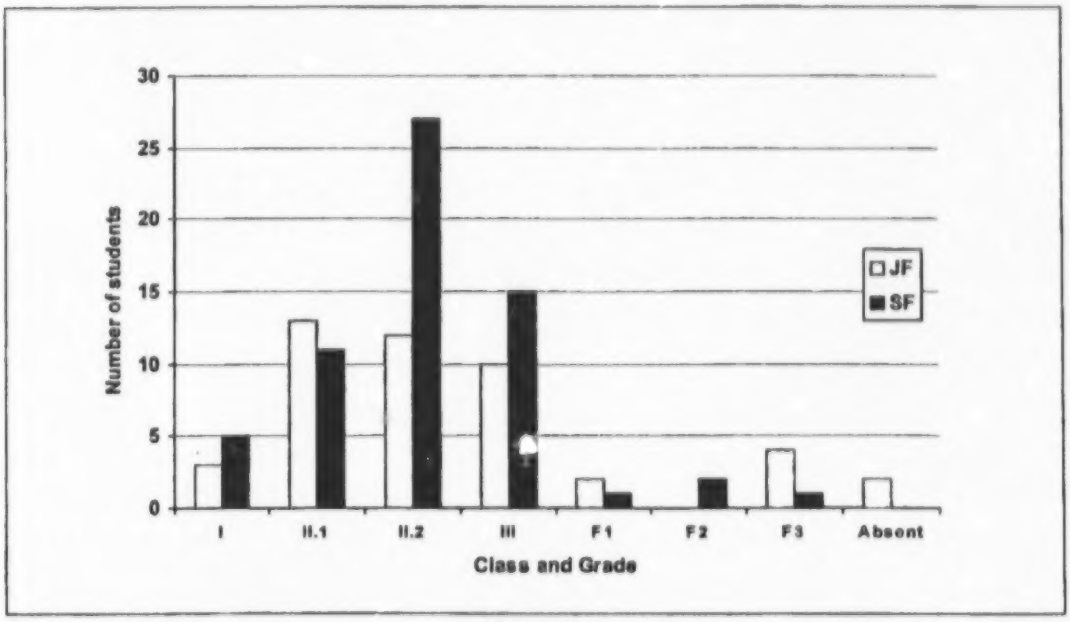

Figure 2.4
BA ICT final assessment results (numbers)

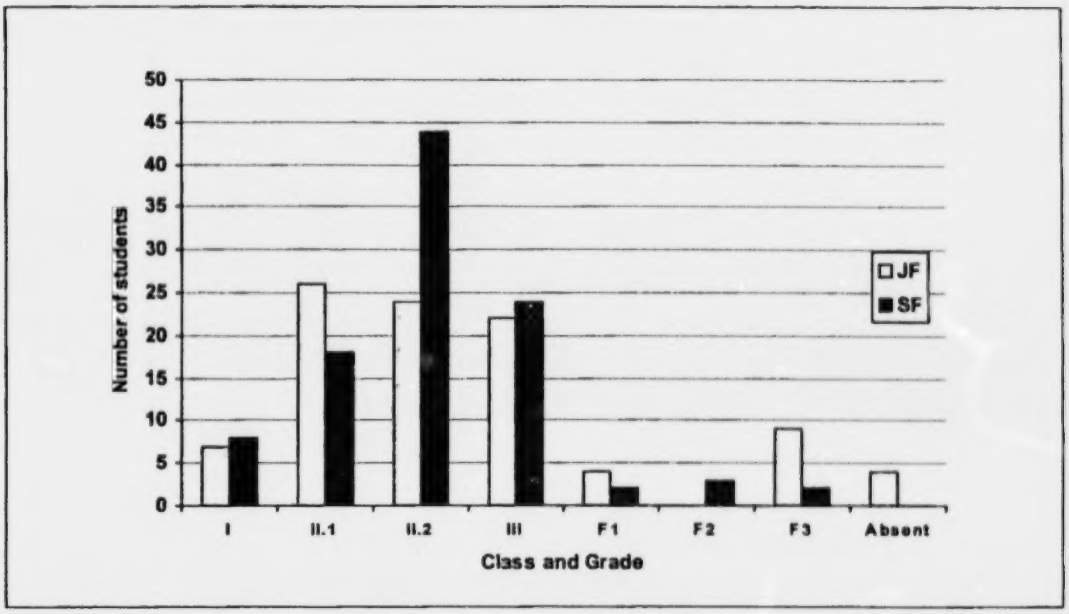

Figure 2.5
BA ICT final assessment results (percentage of year)

mark, 18% achieved II.1, 44% achieved II.2, 24% achieved III, and 7% failed. As in previous years, senior freshman results were on average better than junior freshman results, though the difference was not as pronounced as in previous years. Indeed, compared with 2000–01, more junior than senior freshmen achieved I or II.1 marks (though more junior than senior freshmen failed the course). It should be noted that when junior freshmen fail, they tend to do so by a substantial margin.

2.3 Future directions

2.3.1 MOOs (text-based virtual reality)

Since 1999–2000, the ICT German modules have included a one-term bilateral MOO tandem project with Fachhochschule Rhein-Sieg near Bonn, Germany. In 2001–02 we organized a number of tasks around computer-related texts, which students discussed both in real time in the MOO and via e-mail. Following the principles of tandem language learning, students were urged to divide their MOO sessions and their e-mail exchanges equally between English and German. MOO sessions are recorded automatically and sent to each student and the teacher for evaluation, reflection, and future re-use. Students were required to keep learner diaries and write an essay on their MOO experience.

In 2001–02 we also set up a MOO project with the University of Louvain in Belgium for senior freshmen taking the French module. Both sides agreed on a number of tasks to be completed by student pairs, which yielded a large corpus of data that will be evaluated over the coming months. We plan to extend the German and French MOO projects from one to two terms in the academic year 2002–03.

2.3.2 Tutorial work in ICT

As anticipated in last year's report, we employed native-speaker students to help correct tutorial work. This comprised a variety of tasks that individual students were required to accomplish during the year, depending on their individual weaknesses. Some of the tutorial work in Michaelmas term involved working with native speakers on telecommunications projects (see 2.3.1).

2.3.3 Junior Sophister option for ICT students

As already noted, in 2001–02 we introduced optional extracurricular (evening) French and German modules for junior sophisters in ICT. These modules consisted of fewer contact sessions and longer project cycles than all other modules. Of the 14 students who initially enrolled, 12 completed their module; 7 achieved a first-class result, 4 achieved II.1, and 1 achieved II.2. On the basis of these results we have decided to offer these modules on a regular basis.

2.3.4 Faculty of Health Sciences

From 2002–03, in addition to existing arrangements, students in the Faculty of Health Sciences will be offered places in the evening modules in their fourth and fifth years. This should be seen as another step towards the implementation of College's Broad Curriculum policy.

3 External examiners' reports

3.1 French

Dr Casimir d'Angelo
Language Unit
University of Cambridge

3.1.1 Introduction

In 2001-02, I started a three-year term as external examiner for extracurricular and fully integrated (ICT) French modules. From 29 April to 1 May 2002 I observed presentations by students taking both kinds of module.

3.1.2 Extracurricular modules

From the beginning, it appears obvious that the teaching of the course is thorough and effective, and that a very good relationship exists between teachers and students. Students are aware that they have to work hard in order to succeed: the regular language assignments are carried out seriously, with due attention paid to formal accuracy. The assessment of the assignments by the teachers is careful and accurate: students are rewarded positively for good work but they are nonetheless made aware of areas of weakness (see 3.1.4, remarks on pronunciation).

The students clearly took considerable care in preparing their oral presentations. Their chosen subjects covered a wide range of aspects of French life. In general the students' speech was articulate. On the other hand, when responding to examiners' questions after the presentations, their ability to "think on their feet" in using the language was not always so marked.

As for the quality of assessment, the guidelines were of a high standard and examiners interpreted them in an appropriately systematic manner when completing the rating sheets. The indicated expectations of attainment were clear, and what I have heard of the presentations suggests that most students were well up to the expected standards.

The students also had to produce written dossiers to accompany their presentations. These called on computer and other skills which should be widely applicable in other fields in later life, such as successful use of the internet in French.

3.1.3 Integrated ICT modules

The group presentation obviously reached its target regarding interaction and equal participation. Students tried hard to balance speaking time within the group, giving a chance to the weaker students to cope adequately.

In the final projects, students chose a wide range of relevant topics under the general heading of "Computing and Society". Examples were: "Les jeux vidéos et les

enfants", "L'apprentissage assisté par ordinateur", "Les dangers des téléphones portables". All groups presented in a lively way and to a high standard of knowledge. Students are responsible for organizing their own learning, and from what I saw we can guess they organized it well. The hard work on preparation was evident, with strong efforts in the development of vocabulary and choice of complex stuctures for the topics chosen. Where the work on vocabulary was at its best, students were at ease in the unstructured parts of the exercise. For any student to achieve good results in this, a systematic approach to the gradual broadening of relevant vocabulary from the internet and other sources is required. Those students who were less successful in this task sometimes showed signs of real difficulty in finding the right vocabulary in answer to examiners' questions.

The written dossiers were very well prepared, in a carefully developed way. The students were clearly led to understand the importance of a gradual progression of knowledge. This is important in many other situations besides language learning, where it is essential.

Underlying this is an original methodology that requires the students to reflect on the language learning process as they go along. The carefully systematic methods of stimulating and evaluating these skills are most impressive.

3.1.4 General comments

Pronunciation In general, the weakest area lay in pronunciation. The commonest error observed lay in a tendency among a significant number of students to pronounce some words according to the rules of English, at least where words are spelt the same way and mean the same thing in both languages (e.g. "nation", "France", "regime" etc.). This is more an error of application than of competence. Improvement can be achieved by picking up such errors whenever students make them. A few weeks' practice should be sufficient, making clear that all words encountered are French, so that only French rules can apply. It would be desirable to extend and intensify any exercises already used to assert consistency in pronunciation standards.

Organization of orals The strength of the extracurricular modules is partly due to the fact that they are not compulsory. But both strengths and weaknesses can arise from the non-compulsory character of the modules. In general, the lack of compulsion means that the module will attract only those students who are most committed to learning the language. However, when such a system works best, this motivation is reinforced by an insistence on rigour in the examination, for instance, as well as in the teaching process. The degree of consistency this implies was not always evident in the tests under review. For example, in some tests every group was required to stay for the whole session, so that all groups listened to all the others. On other occasions, students were allowed to leave the hall as soon as their group had completed its presentation. There is a risk that this may give an undue advantage to those who present last: not only will they be more aware of the standard required after hearing the other groups, but the tension induced by speaking to an audience of peers will be reduced. Greater care would also be desirable in consistently applying standards of punctuality to all concerned.

3.1.5 Conclusion

The specific aims of the language courses in CLCS vary according to levels, but the guiding principle is to make the students better equipped for autonomous learning. CLCS clearly provides the type of teaching required to fulfil such an aim. This seems to me an extremely positive approach when we think of the future of our students: it has now become obvious that a significant number of them will work in an international environment and will be confronted with unexpected cultures whose language they will have to learn.

Guidelines and reports from previous years were sent to me well in advance, and I wish to thank Klaus Schwienhorst for his most effective assistance. The French test coordinators were extremely helpful despite the many simultaneous tasks they had to carry out at such crucial moments. I would have appreciated a fuller opportunity to discuss the methods used with the coordinators before the orals actually started. Some time is naturally required by

coordinators before the start to put the technical facilities in place, and it would have been useful to reserve some further time before that to enable the external examiner to be fully briefed.

3.2 German

Prof. Dr. Bernd Voss
Technische Universität
Dresden
Germany

3.2.1 Introductory remarks

2001–02 was my first year as external examiner for the two types of language course offered by the Centre for Language and Communication Studies: (i) the modules integrated into the BA (Mod.) in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and (ii) the extracurricular modules for students of other disciplines (FLM). The visit was well prepared, with extensive documentation available in advance, access to all relevant materials and to oral examination sessions while in Dublin, and comprehensive documentation including videotapes sent afterwards. I wish to record my thanks here to Klaus Schwienhorst, Language Modules Co-ordinator, and his team for the excellent organization.

3.2.2 Information received and presentations attended

The documentation received in advance was both comprehensive and informative: a course programme each for FLM and ICT, a Guide to Self-Access Study, guidelines for group presentations (for German/Italian beginners 1 and 2), detailed guidelines for the projects "Information Booklet" (French/German/Spanish non-beginners 1, French/German ICT/JF), "Newsletter" (French/German/Spanish non-beginners 2) and "Computers and Society" (French/German ICT/SF), and a series of rating sheets and assessment guidelines for oral presentations (beginners 1, 2, non-beginners, ICT students) and written presentations (non-beginners, ICT students).

The list demonstrates the detail and range of coverage of the documentation. The material clearly shows aim, approach, working methods, expectations of the learner, support available from the institution, and both general procedures and detailed criteria used in determining assessment results. This degree of transparency is unusual in this field and can be called a model of its kind, with the Guide to Self-Access Study a particularly outstanding example.

The oral presentations I attended took place on 29 and 30 April 2002. They covered the first and second years of the ICT programme, a German beginners group and a German for non-beginners group, the latter two from the extracurricular (FLM) programme. The project presentations of other groups were made available to me on videotape. In addition I was able to inspect the written work that served as a basis for the presentations.

3.2.3 Course design

The number of contact hours in both programmes is very limited (about 40 hours per year in FLM and 60 hours per year in ICT, in both cases maximally extending over 2 years). This is at the extreme lower end of time investment in language learning likely to lead to practically useful results and needs to be borne in mind when evaluating the results.

The general approach is strongly individualized and learner-oriented rather than instruction-based, with a marked emphasis on providing the learner with a learning environment that encourages the development both of individual (language) discovery procedures and of interaction skills through use of the target language with peers and staff. This is in keeping with current thinking and research in foreign language learning and teaching. It also allows teachers and students to make judicious use of the very limited class time, with clear procedures and expectations for essential complementary work outside classroom hours.

3.2.4 Assessment procedures

Course evaluation is based on continuous assessment and formal examination, in reasonable proportions (60/40 in ICT, 50/50 in FLM). Formal assessment is based on a project presentation and a paper-and-pencil test (dictation, C-test). There are comprehensive assessment guidelines for the

written and for the oral work within the framework of the presentations, with expected global maximum levels of attainment specified for each type of class and broken down into descriptions of five (sub)levels of closeness to the global maximum level.

While it is notoriously difficult to formulate satisfactory descriptors – and there may be some room here for further development and also completion (e.g. written presentation, textual organization, etc.) – the approach is thoroughly professional, at an impressive stage of development, and much further advanced than can be seen in many comparable institutions.

A special feature is the systematic development of self-assessment skills. This is partly done through use of the European Language Portfolio (in its adaptation to higher education as pioneered by CLCS), in particular the use of the self-assessment grid of the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference (with the categories Listening, Reading, Spoken Interaction, Spoken Production, Writing). It is also done through regular explicit feedback requests ("What did I learn from the presentation?"), which help learners to develop a greater degree of awareness of where they are and what they still need to work on most urgently.

There can be no doubt that this is an important move to undertake, and although the present results of the self-assessments should perhaps not be overestimated – quite understandably learners seem to be rather uncertain how to measure their performance against the self-assessment grid – it seems a significant pedagogical measure to help the learners to gradually develop an awareness that is sufficiently accurate without being discouraging.

3.2.5 Students' oral presentations

The oral presentations are designed not only to show individual oral skills, but also interaction between peers and with staff. Apart from language skills as such, presentation skills are also focussed on. I was able to inspect a representative cross-section of presentations *in situ* and the remainder were made available to me on video. The format of the presentations allowed a good insight into students' command of the oral language. There was fundamental agreement with the assessments given and the calibration used by the examiners.

A few additional and largely impressionistic comments may be in order here:

- The general confidence in working with the foreign language was unexpectedly high, considering the time constraints referred to above.
- The presentations were on the whole remarkable more for their content than for their language. No doubt the content interest is an important factor in language learning, and communication does not work very well if there is nothing worth saying. However, some learners need to make more of an effort to convince their listeners of the interest of their topic by making their language more easily understandable.
- The presentation techniques, although an explicit part of the programme, left room for improvement. It was the exception rather than the rule that group members really interacted with one another or used visuals or presentation programmes such as PowerPoint.
- The biggest single problem lies with pronunciation, with a not inconsiderable number of learners well below the comprehensibility threshold.
- The differences between the individual members of the classes seemed greater than between the average performances of the different year groups (cf. ICT groups JF/SF, or FLM non-beginners 1/2). The ICT groups seemed on the whole weaker than the others.

3.2.6 Students' written work

The written work that I saw was in the form of dossiers developed to support the oral presentations. They also contained some explicit language work (on vocabulary).

The format is interesting and apt to help learners focus also on the necessary degree of formal accuracy. Inevitably, not all learners make sufficient use of a sensible format, and the standard varies. Some learners, when working on their vocabulary lists, invent their own example sentences. It would be better if they culled examples from their authentic

reading material, unless staff can systematically correct examples invented by students.

3.2.7 Conclusions

I have described the set-up of the programmes in some detail as a way of finding my way into the general philosophy and implementation of language learning and teaching in CLCS. I am impressed by the framework, by the thoughtful implementation, by the high degree of student involvement in their own learning process, and by the openness to further development (e.g. in self-assessment). I am also impressed by most of the results in that the learners seem to have profited exceptionally well from the learning arrangements offered to them. They have an appropriate degree of confidence in using German, they are accustomed to making use of their receptive skills, and their command of vocabulary and control of grammar, with due variations according to level (beginners, non-beginners), is acceptable in their written work.

The problem area is pronunciation. In my observation, there are three problems here. In a number of cases the learners do not seem to know (or care?) what the pronunciation of a lexical item is (typical of "eye" words, i.e. words picked up from reading, not from hearing). In a number of cases students know what the pronunciation is, but cannot do it, getting mixed up in the process. And in a large number of cases students are apparently not aware that the phonology of German differs considerably from that of English, so that they need listeners with a good command of English to understand what they are trying to say in German. This needs to be addressed urgently. At present, most of the language input seems to be through the eye: this needs to be systematically supplemented by acoustic (or audio-visual) input. Students need to be trained to consult (and understand) the pronunciation help given in dictionaries. And there needs to be an intensive phase, however short, of phonetic training and phonological information (e.g. on dropping of the post-vocalic [r], on separation of syllables, or on the different hesitation signals acceptable in each language etc.).

As suggested earlier, the levels achieved by individual students vary considerably, perhaps even more so than between year groups. With videos available now to support one's observations it will be interesting to see how much progress individual learners will have made by my next visit. (Perhaps by then it will also be possible to have clip-on microphones for the speakers, to make the acoustics easier?) Students at TCD can consider themselves lucky to be offered such an outstanding language programme. Next year's visit is certainly something to look forward to.

Appendix
Summary of income and expenditure

Income		
Brought forward from 2000–01	€72,370	
Extracurricular modules	€28,224	
BAICT modules	€43,806	
Total		**€144,400**
Expenditure		
Pay costs	€80,986	
Equipment	€76	
Books, journals and learning materials	€3,394	
Stationery, photocopying and printing	€676	
Travel, accommodation and entertainment	€1,095	
Miscellaneous	€2,908	
Total		**€89,135**
Carried forward to 2002–03		**€55,265**

FL027595

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

NOTICE

REPRODUCTION BASIS

☒ This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket) form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.

☐ This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").